



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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To: CDD District Manager, All Field Managers

From: State Director

Subject: Interagency Fire Program Management Grade Structure for Fire Management Officers and Fuels Specialist Grade Structure under the Regional Concept

A review by the State Fire Management Officer and the Human Resources classification lead has determined that under California BLM's regional organizational structure, all Fire Management Officer and Fuels Management positions are currently classified correctly. This determination is the result of a year-long effort to establish a fair and logical grade structure for the fire program as we implement Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM) which will be in full effect October 1, 2009.

Since implementation started, numerous Standard Position Descriptions (SPD's) have been established by the National Office. Several field offices have sent in recruitment and reclassification actions for Fire and Fuels Management positions utilizing the SPD's. The California State Office recently did a comparison between the new Standard PD's and the current California PD's to determine if positions were classified correctly or if the SPD's would more accurately represent California's needs.

Following is a chronology of steps taken and the decisions that were derived from the study:

PROPOSED ACTION:

1. Abolish the BLM-CA SPD #00F4001, Fire Management Scientist, GS-0401-11, and establish the Department's SPD #DOI026, Fire Management Officer, GS-0401-12.
2. Abolish the BLM-CA SPD # F23010, Fuels Management Specialist, GS-401-9, and establish the Department's SPD #DOI022, Fire Management Specialist, GS-401-11

LOCATION: All applicable Field Offices

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In October 2004, the Department of Interior developed Standard Position Descriptions for the positions of Fire Management Officer, GS-11 and GS-12, and Fire Management Specialist (Fuels), GS-9 and GS-11.

The Fire Management Officer, GS-11, DOI-SPD is to be used for a position located in an organization with a moderate fire management program complexity level. The Fire Management Officer, GS-12, DOI-SPD is to be used for a position located in an organization with a high fire management program complexity level.

The Fire Management Specialist, GS-9, DOI-SPD is to be used for a position located in an organization with a low to moderate fire management program complexity level or one that serves in support of a higher level position in a moderate/high complexity program. The Fire Management Specialist, GS-11, DOI-SPD is to be used for a position located in an organization with a moderate to high fire management program complexity level.

EVALUATION:

The high complexity level is determined by the following factors:

Fire Season: Prescribed fire and wildland fire incidents occurring during the same time frame of a prolonged fire season of six months or more.

Budget: Includes over 2 activity areas, plus management of over 2 contracts.

Logistics: Access and proximity disallows time efficiency of operation on a one-day basis. Over 25% of unit lands only accessible by aerial delivery systems. Initial response times to meet management objectives are difficult to meet. Unit requires 3 or more radio frequencies to accommodate normal radio traffic. More than 2 work stations require support. A 100 person fire cache permanently located on the unit. Duration of support personnel is greater than 2 weeks.

Workforce Management: Provides leadership to at least 2 program supervisors in addition to directly supervising other non-supervisory employees. Employee works in more than three program activities. Manages larger number of employees for more and 180 days, for numerous projects/incident, e.g. temporary employee assigned to the unit, or firefighters detailed in for a wildland or prescribed fire project.

Program Objectives: Objectives are complex in nature, e.g. externally and internal controversial; require many, varied expensive resources to implement. Several objectives are in direct conflict, e.g.: air quality vs. implementation of prescribed fire projects, or endangered species habitat protection vs. hazard fuel reduction; or hazard fuel reduction vs. watershed protection.

Planning: Covers 3 or more program activity areas. Unit level land management planning, including NEPA requirements, requires participation of the fire program manager as a member of the interdisciplinary team. Due to the complexity of numerous conflicting objectives, and high social/political/economic concerns, the unit fire management plan is very detailed. The wildland and prescribed fire portions of the program are under intense scrutiny. Numerous attempts at public involvement are required to arrive at consensus. Individual project plans are rated at moderate to high in complexity, using agency approved method of project evaluation. Appropriate management responses, described in the approved fire management plan, are difficult to determine, due to the nature of the multidirectional, conflicting objectives. NEPA process requires the completion of an EIS most of the time.

Contracts: Numerous EERA's are used annually, some or many of which are complex in nature. Manage two or more exclusive use aviation contracts. Frequently contracts with other federal/state/tribal/local jurisdictions to provide fire management services for them, often for multiple types of services.

Agreements/Cooperators: Frequent continual operations with cooperators under formal agreements, many of which are MOAs requiring exchange of funds. Agreements are complex and/or have high degree of breadth of scope, e.g. agreements cover initial and extended attack, or extended prescribed wildland fire use operations.

Multi-Unit Responsibility: Responsible for multiple units within multiple jurisdictions.

Social/Political/Economic: Potential to be controversial in nature due to internal and/or external conflicts. Conflicts are not easily resolved. Public access and safety are a major concern due a very high visitor use, and/or wildland/urban intermix. Sensitive issues such as air quality, T&E species, high value watersheds, cultural resources, etc. Political activity related to the total fire management program is present, and potentially affects day to day operations. Considerable medial interest exists. Public contacts consist of individual and group contacts. Program operations have the potential of severely negatively affecting the local economy.

CALIFORNIA'S EVALUATION:

A review of each Field Office's Fire Management Program was conducted by the CASO Fire Staff. The Fire Management Programs that could conceivably meet the above criteria if California's fire program **was not** set up as regional areas were identified.

In November, 2003, the Field Managers came to a consensus that due to a number of changes and evolving issues within the Fire Management Program, it was necessary to establish a Regional Fire Management Officer, GS-401-13, to perform the duties associated with the many high complex factors listed above, e.g. increased emphasis in fuels management, community protection and education as a result of the National Fire Plan of 2000. Also, the National Fire Plan imposed an increased emphasis and budget on vegetation management and protection of wildland urban interface (WUI) on a landscape scale. More interagency cooperation and project coordination was needed to overcome jurisdictional boundaries, not as a result of fire behavior. Additional fire prevention personnel were required because of the increased emphasis on fire prevention and interagency interaction needed to work on a landscape scale. Increased complexity in managing the fire budget was caused by expanding the Wildland Fire sub-activities to track the increased budget in fuels management, community fire assistance, and rural fire assistance. An increase in fire permanent work force, without an increase in the preparedness budget, also made project planning essential to the preparedness budgets remaining solvent by using project allocated funds to make up the difference.

The Regional Fire Management Officer position is responsible for fire management planning, program direction and coordination, and evaluation of a complex fire management program. This position provides for managing a highly complex fire program by consolidating areas of the state into manageable regions. California was divided into regions for better management of a highly complex program, having north, central and southern regions, each having a minimum of 4 diverse and geographically dispersed field offices, and a large number of state, other federal agency and local cooperators with whom the Regional Fire Management Officer must interact to carry out the BLM's fire management mission effectively. The geographic diversity requires consideration of different fire regimes, fuels treatments and interdisciplinary team work to ensure use of good science and landscape level multiple resource protection, maintenance and conservation for future generations in a state where there are ongoing concerns about further stresses to fragile ecosystems and endangered species habitat. The dispersion and largeness of the state requires accomplishment of the BLM mission through cooperation with other agencies and interagency agreements. The population, especially in numbers expanding into the wild land environment, requires special attention to the urban interface, its issues, problems and their cooperative resolution through collaboration. Issues with publics as diverse as those found in California, escalate quickly into political and management problems. For example, many areas of the State include retirement and vacation properties with high property values, and absentee landowners or communities where wild land fire can have serious economic impacts and/or political impacts.

CONCLUSION:

BLM-CA will continue using the BLM-CA SPDs for the Fire Management Officer, GS-401-11, and the Fire Management Scientist (Fuels), GS-401-9 positions.

The BLM-CA Fire Program is organized as regional areas with a Regional FMO, Assistant Regional FMO, and support staff for better management of a highly complex program. The DOI-SPDs for the Fire Management Officer, GS-12, and the Fuels Management Specialist, GS-401-11, are not appropriate for use with this structure.

If you have questions, please contact Ed Wehking, State Fire Management Officer at (916) 978-4431.

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